

Editorial

I was recently invited to address divinity students training for the ministry of the Church of Scotland on the topic, 'Stop the Rot' or, 'Can the decline of the Church be halted?'. A summary of that address is given below. I apologise to readers who are not members of the Church of Scotland for making this summary my editorial, but I suspect that at least some of the points made may have relevance to other denominations as well as my own.

The Ministry

What is the one single overriding factor which distinguishes growing churches from those which are diminishing? Having some small experience of churches which *are* growing and flourishing, often in the most hostile environments (for example, in Indonesia, Korea and Brazil), it is the conviction of thriving churches that the Bible is authoritative and contains the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ which marks them out.

In the pulpits of such churches, the Word is preached with confidence and faith. Sin is declared to be sin. The holiness, righteousness and love of God are not seen as mutually exclusive. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are proclaimed as God's remedy for the human problem.

On the other hand, in churches that are dying, the 'rot' can be traced back to a loss of confidence in Scripture's authority. 'If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?' (1 Cor. 14:8). Uncertain, tentative preaching which betrays to those listening that the minister has little or no conviction about what is being said will never equip the people for the conflict with evil and temptation. It is not enough for preachers to rant a bit and get hot under the collar. Unless their message is based on biblical truth, a sceptical congregation will only become more sceptical.

Why is it that so many of Scotland's teachers of theology feel they have to

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show such respect for the latest fad in epistemology? Can they not see that just as logical positivism had its day and is now gone, likewise post-structuralism will also have its day and be soon gone? Why then base theological instruction on a narrow, liberal view of Scripture, refusing (as most of them do) to acknowledge that there is another scholarly, well argued and sustainable school of thought? Why do some try to destroy faith in Scripture as the Word of God (and even take satisfaction in so doing)?

If we are to stop the rot, we must equip our ministers to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ with confidence and conviction.

The Church's policy of reappraisal of parishes

I want to raise questions regarding the church's apparent determination at all costs to link or unite a certain proportion of our congregations. The plans for reappraisal of parishes may have good reasons behind them. The intention may be to check the ever increasing financial burden on self-supporting congregations which support those which are aid-receiving. It is also argued that the church simply does not have enough candidates for the ministry to staff so many moribund churches.

However, it is time that we asked whether the approach of the church 'from the top down' is right. Let me cite an example of what I mean. A Scottish town I know presently has four Church of Scotland congregations. One of the four is already a linked charged and its minister has some 900 members to care for. All four are currently self-supporting, though two are struggling. The presbytery's plan is to reduce the number of congregations from four to two.

Such congregations have no choice. The plan is presented to them as a *fait accompli*. It can be argued from past experience that of the two congregations which lose their buildings about 60% of the membership will be lost to the churches. But more will be lost. The contributions of those two congregations to the church's central funds,

though small, will also be lost. I know the argument is that they may well have to become aid-receiving in the near future. Is this the only possible approach?

- Just say the decision to unite or link was given to the congregations to make instead of being made by the Presbytery.
- Just say congregations A and B were told that, as long as they could pay a minister the appropriate stipend with expenses and keep their buildings and manse in good repair, they could have a minister.
- Just say the responsibility for those two congregations' future was laid firmly in the lap of the Kirk Sessions and their financial courts.
- Just say no power on earth could close or unite any of our congregations as long as they met all the costs of maintaining themselves, then might not the results in the national church be very different from those which we see today?

If the only ground for possible linkage or union was that a congregation could no longer support itself, might congregations A and B, realising their future lay in their own hands, begin to work to ensure they continue to have a future? Certainly if that were to happen and if congregations currently aid-receiving were told that their future could be guaranteed if they could pay their bills and meet their targets, then the financial levies presently on all congregations might begin to fall as individual congregations took matters in hand.

I myself have seen such a philosophy of reappraisal being worked out in practice. I have seen a Church where the presbyteries' rôle is pastoral rather than dictatorial. Out of 563 congregations, there have only been three unions in the past ten years and each of these have been in city areas where there has been drastic and almost total depopulation.

My plea, therefore, is for an about turn in the philosophy of reappraisal. I am not for one moment suggesting that our present approach (which many see as dictatorial) is the only factor in church decline. I am suggesting that in a very complex formula for congregational well-being, responsibility at grass-root

level is a most influential factor. If unions and linkages continue at the rate of the past few years, then the future for the Church of Scotland is bleak indeed.

Congregational activity

There was a day in the Church of Scotland when many congregations' organisations were in orbit around social activity. Spirituality had ceased to be the motivation for church life. Instead, there had grown up clubs of all sorts, many of which had been taken over by enthusiasts who had no link whatsoever with the church whose halls were being used. It was only to be expected, therefore, that there should be a reaction by evangelicals against such groups which were contributing nothing to church life except to make it increasingly secular.

However, it is high time for those on the evangelical wing of the church to reconsider very seriously whether a simplified structure which consists only in church services plus gatherings for prayer and Bible study is appropriate for witness in today's society. I am thinking less of the strong gathered congregations and more of the communal congregations. I believe there is an unanswerable case for communal congregations to engage vigorously in the task of 'building bridges' with the people of their parishes as a means to evangelism.

My case needs setting out far more fully than present space allows, but my argument is for congregations to be bringing in people of every age and stage to hear the Word of God in more informal settings. I myself have first hand experience of congregations growing significantly as men and women come to living faith because they were first befriended through one or other of the various congregational groups functioning to meet genuine needs within the local community.

The need for imaginative, sensitive but robust evangelism has never been greater within a church than it is within the Church of Scotland today. We hear of the growth of the Korean Church; I suspect many would be taken aback to learn of the strenuous, untiring, certainly

unconventional evangelism which is exercised as part of the Korean Church's ongoing life.

That brings me to my next point.

The Balance of 'inreach' and 'outreach'

In the present decline in congregations throughout the Church of Scotland, those of an evangelical persuasion or with evangelical ministries (the two are not necessarily the same), have not been exempt. Certainly, there have been notable exceptions, but generally the decline has shown no partiality and has taken in congregations of every theological shade.

What has been true of most congregations, again irrespective of theological emphasis, has been their failure to balance 'inreach' against 'outreach'. The greater part of congregational activity has for too long been concerned to minister to the needs of the faithful. For many congregations 100% of activity has been 'inreach'. Those that have engaged in 'outreach' have given perhaps 2% or 3% of their budget and energy to evangelism, often merely as token efforts to acknowledge evangelism has Biblical warrant.

Even a casual look at the Bible tells a very different story. Take the ministries of the Lord and his great servant Paul. Both gave 'outreach' a massive proportion of their time and energy, while never neglecting 'inreach'—the nurture and care of the faithful. Until we apply the Biblical perspective to parishes throughout Scotland, we stand little chance of ever stopping the present catastrophic decline of the church.

The expectation of the Holy Spirit

The charismatic movement and more recently the 'Toronto blessing' movement have sought to take more seriously than has been wont the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. We are Trinitarian in our doctrine. We believe in one God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But for identifiable reasons we have had a low expectation of the Spirit's

presence amongst us.

The Holy Spirit's great tasks are: to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement; to take the things of Christ and reveal them to believers; to bring those who are dead to God into new life through the new birth; to equip believers with spiritual gifts for the upbuilding of the body; to live in each believer and so to live within the entire fellowship.

No one would deny that the Spirit continues to fulfil his divine office within the Godhead. But what we must confess is that we have both grieved and quenched the Spirit by our own stubbornness and sin, and consequently have inhibited the growth of the Church and thereby contributed to its decline. What is it among us that grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit? I mention, almost at random, five things.

First, personal disobedience and persistent sin. The Spirit speaks and puts his finger on things that are wrong, but we silence his voice and choose our own way, preferring our 'peccadillos' to his blessing.

Second, resentments and grudges within the congregation hinder the Spirit's presence. Unless forbearance and the grace of daily forgiveness lubricate the wheels of each fellowship, the gentle Dove is grieved and absents himself from our gatherings.

Third, deviation from the revealed truth of God will also banish the Spirit from the church. He is the Spirit of truth, and he only bears witness to the truth. When those in the pulpit invent their own or another gospel they may proclaim it in their own power, but they will never deliver it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, love of the world and its possessions, because it takes away our love for the Lord, will drive the Spirit from among us. The great sin of our generation with which we have learned to live has become love of this material world. I know that in many congregations as few as 50 members will spend on their annual holidays more than the entire congregational annual budget. While the work of God languishes for lack of funds, believers are wining and dining

in exotic places and return from holidays which cost into four figures to place £5 or £10 in the offering plate. When our love of self so exceeds our love of Christ that we spend more on personal leisure than we put into the nail-scarred hand, then the Spirit not merely leaves us, but Christ himself vomits us from his mouth.

Fifth, the Spirit is grieved when we serve God out of a desire for self-glory or self-satisfaction.

Expectation of the Spirit's work among us is at an all time low. I am not saying we do not believe in the Spirit. But we seem to have forgotten that it is by his power alone that the spiritually dead are awakened, blind eyes are opened, deaf ears unstopped, hard hearts softened and proud wills broken. Until we as Christians repent of our sins (which are far more numerous than those suggested above), then we will neither have much expectation of the divine presence among us nor even want him among us.

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These thoughts on the decline of the Church in Scotland today are offered merely as personal reflections. If there is only a grain of truth in *one* of them, may God enable us to apply that truth to ourselves. May he be yet pleased to turn the tide until see being added to the church daily those who are being saved.

A Biblical View

**Rev. E.J.
Alexander**



I believe it would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of the eldership for the sake not only of the local church but also of the national church. The issues concerning a biblical view of the eldership are quite crucial. As I pray for the revival of the Church in Scotland and beyond, I find myself increasingly praying for the reformation of our view of the eldership.

The Church

Before we deal with the office of the elder in some detail, we should consider briefly a little about the Church in which the elder holds office. In the New Testament several metaphors are used to describe the Church of Christ. The Church is depicted as a *body* in which believers are members. Or as a *flock* and believers are the sheep in that flock. The Church is also seen as a *household* or *family* in which believers are members. At other times it is a *building* into which believers are being built as 'living stones'.

Whichever metaphor scripture uses, integral to the biblical teaching about the Church is the *headship of Jesus Christ* over the Church. He is the head of the body, he is the head of the family, he is the headstone on the corner of the building, he is the Chief Shepherd of the flock. Wherever these metaphors occur in the New Testament to describe the Church they preserve this basic truth of the headship of Christ. We are bound to say, therefore, that the New Testament teaches the Church is only truly itself when it is distinguished by this headship and Lordship of Christ.

The authority of Christ

Our starting point must be, therefore, the understanding that the overseer (elder) must be governed, led and directed by Christ as head of his Church. The conclusion one has to draw from

Christ's headship of his Church is that the Church is not a democracy. A democracy is ruled by the will of the majority, according to their wishes, with the right to decide its own aims, constitution and functions. It is a common misunderstanding that the Church is a democracy in this sense. But it is of profound importance that we correct such a wrong view, because the Church of Christ in the New Testament is never a democracy. If anything, it is a monarchy where Christ is the King and Head. To him belongs all authority. As we shall see, his authority in the Church he delegates in some measure to those he chooses to be elders.

The nature of biblical government

We need to clarify three things about the specific nature of biblical church government. First, it is *spiritual government*. It is concerned with the spiritual life, well-being, guidance and direction of God's people. All the Church's authority derives from Him. So it is primarily the spiritual government of God's people.¹ Therefore its disciplines are spiritual disciplines and its aims are spiritual aims.

Secondly, true church government is *pastoral government*. Its emphasis is pastoral care rather than legal rule.

Thirdly, true church government—and this is most important of all—is *biblical government*. Its laws and princi-

of the Eldership

ples are not derived from human wisdom but from God's. So whenever we think about church government, we must think about biblical laws, biblical revelation and biblical principles because these are the only foundations on which the government of the Church may be built.

We know that the authority of scripture is vital in guiding our personal lives. It is just as vital for shaping our communal life as the Church of God. All offices within the Church need to be derived and understood only from scripture—not from profession, nor from convenience but only from scripture. Only then will our understanding of eldership be accurate, and our exercise of eldership be effective.

The biblical vocabulary of eldership

Eldership in Judaism

The biblical vocabulary helps us to understand the nature and calling of the elder. The origin of the concept of the eldership goes right back to the roots of the Old Testament revelation. Moses is told by God to gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord God of your fathers appeared to me' (Ex. 3:16). We can trace the biblical concept of the elder right through the Old Testament.²

In the course of Jesus' ministry we frequently read in the gospels about the elders. However badly they may have been leading God's people, however corrupt they may have become, elders appear in the Gospel as rulers of God's people.³ This demonstrates that the apostles were not introducing something new when they ordained elders. They were building on the foundation of pre-

spiritual authority comes from being an example to the flock

vious biblical revelation. The eldership is something that goes back to the roots of Judaeo-Christian history. The government of the church by elders is a pattern found throughout the whole Bible.

The Old Testament word for elder is very significant. It probably originally meant somebody who had a beard, the idea behind it being someone who was reasonably mature. Clearly an elder was someone recognised as belonging to the *older* age group, but not necessarily to the *elderly* age group. We may have misunderstood the vocabulary since we tend to think of elders as 'the elderly'. The emphasis is more likely to have been on the wisdom and maturity which comes with years. Certainly that is the empha-

sis that we need if we are going to understand the progression from the Old Testament vocabulary into the New Testament.

Did you know that the President of the United States has only one qualification and that is he must be over the age of thirty-five? That is the one qualification. Now you may think that is not a very adequate qualification. But it is a significant thing that their law says in effect he needs to be (literally) a 'bearded individual'—he needs to be a man who will in some sense command respect and be able to exercise authority. That intention is exactly the meaning behind the biblical word for elder which is that the office of President should only be held by a man with the wisdom of maturer years.

All ministers are elders...there is no hierarchy within the eldership

However, note that Paul writes to Timothy and says to him, 'Don't let anyone despise your youthfulness'.⁴ What he is saying is that spiritual authority does not come *automatically* with the years; spiritual authority comes from being *an example* to the flock which is what Paul goes on to tell Timothy he is to be: 'Don't let anybody despise your youthfulness,' he says, 'but be an example to the believers in speech, life, love, faith and purity'.

A godly example is what conveys spiritual authority. We see this in our own fellowships. We discover those who in years may be comparatively young but who have risen to a place of spiritual stature and maturity which many who are much older have not achieved.

Christian usage

In the New Testament we find two Greek words for eldership (*presbuteros* and *episcopos*) which have given to us our English words Presbyterian and Episcopal. The word *presbuteros* which is usually translated 'elder' probably refers to the qualities of the office—the character of

the man, the kind of person he needs to be. The word *episcopos*, translated 'bishop' in the AV but 'overseer' in most modern versions, probably refers to the *function* he fulfils. Certainly there is no doubt that the New Testament uses these two words interchangeably to describe the same people.⁵ Indeed, the New Testament evidence obliges us to deduce that the eldership is the one ruling office in the early Church. The vast majority of modern scholars would not dispute this.

Ruling and teaching elders

There are clear New Testament grounds for distinguishing two aspects of the work of elders which lead to the development of two categories of elder: the ruling elder and the teaching elder. In 1

Timothy 5:17 we read, 'The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour'. Clearly the reference is to ruling elders, 'the elders who *direct the affairs* of the church well...' But there follows this phrase, 'especially those whose work is *preaching and teaching*'.

When we look carefully at that statement we see there are two conclusions one may draw. The first is that all elders rule. The second is that within the ruling eldership are some who also preach and teach as their main ministry. The natural reading of Paul's comment suggests that there are two separate ministries which elders fulfil. All elders rule, but some elders also teach and preach.

There are no grounds for suggesting that ruling elders should never preach or teach. But it is possible to infer that there are some elders who need to be supported by the church to give themselves mainly to the ministry of preaching and teaching. Such an inference is supported by Paul's following comment, 'For the Scripture says, "Do

not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the corn" and "The worker deserves his wages"' (1 Tim. 5:18). The apostle is addressing the need for the church to set aside some of its elders to give themselves to labour in this teaching ministry alone. That is to be their main contribution to the church's life.⁶

So far, therefore, we may deduce three things about the eldership:

1. It is marked by plurality that is, there are several elders in each church.

2. It is marked by equality that is, there is no hierarchy within the eldership; the office of minister or pastor finds its significance within the institution and not outside of it.

This equality within the eldership is such a fundamental principal in my view that I am not entirely happy to make a distinction between ministers and elders. All ministers (so-called) are elders. Their function may be that they minister the word but nonetheless they are still elders. There is no hierarchy within the eldership.

3. It is marked by diversity—that is, although the *status* of all elders is equal, the *function* of elders will inevitably be different: some will excel in some gifts, some in others; some will excel in some qualities and others in different qualities.

To be continued

Endnotes

- 1 It is true that historically in Scotland Kirk Sessions have had certain civil powers. But essentially, the government of elders is a spiritual government.
- 2 See for example Judg. 8:14; 1 Sam. 8:4; 2 Kgs 19:2; Ruth 4:2; Ezra 5:5; Ezek. 8:1; Isa. 24:23 etc.
- 3 E.g. Matt. 15:2, 16:21, 26:3; Mk 7:3, 8:31, 11:27, 14:43; Lk. 7:3, 9:22, 20:1 etc.
- 4 1 Tim. 4:12.
- 5 See Acts 20:17&28; 1 Pet. 5:1&2; Tit. 1:5&7; 1 Tim. 3:1&17.
- 6 We will comment in a subsequent study on Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 3:2 that elders should be 'able to teach'.

Historical Sermons

An Exhortation to the Presbyteries of Lothian

at Edinburgh, 16th September, 1589
by

Master Robert Bruce, Minister of Christ's Evangel

It is not unknown, brothers, that in Timothy we have set down the true pattern of a profitable pastor: how he should behave himself in all things, what he should do, what he should leave undone, what he should follow, what he should flee. In everything he is forewarned but chiefly, among many, of one thing, that he study not to please men: that he hunt not for their praise and commendation.

For why? Experience from time to time has taught that such men have not only imperilled their own estate, but hazarded also the whole estate of the kirk. There were two in the days of Timothy who, to get a name among men that they were curious disputers and subtle reasoners, moved doubts upon everything, chopping and changing the truth of God as if it had been the profane word of mere mortal man. Ultimately, they began to ask questions and to raise doubts upon the very articles of our belief.

The spirit of the devil so carried them forward that from doubting it finally came to plain defection. They denied the resurrection in particular. So, they not only lost themselves and poisoned

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not be ashamed, dividing the word of truth aright (2 Tim. 2:15).

their hearers, but they perverted the truth of God so far as in them lay. From these men's example, the Apostle warned Timothy, and through him every pastor, to be aware not only of this vain jangling about words, especially in matters of conscience, but chiefly to be aware of the root and fountain wherefrom they spring—that natural self-love which we all nourish in our bosoms, and are so loath to part with all our days.

We have an example in our time of a man going about to make himself great and to get the praise of men, who in the end not only hazarded his own estate, but imperilled the estate of the whole kirk, so far as lay in him.¹ So, as the example of Hymenaeus was used to alert Timothy to be aware of such a vice, so let the example of our Hymenaeus, who

is still fresh in our memories, alert us that we fall not into the same snare. Let it warn us lest we seek not only not to hunt for the praise of men but also that we resolve to turn from the root and fountain from which it springs—that natural self-love of which every one of us has a portion. Since we are enrolled into the school of Christ, let us study to learn this one lesson, to renounce ourselves. The Lord give us hearts to learn it, and make us both to be born again and to renounce ourselves in this life. This is not the work of man but the singular work of God renewing man!

Now as he has shown him what he must avoid and the vice from which he should chiefly flee, so in this verse, he begins to admonish him that its opposite is the chief virtue which he should embrace, and the only target he should shoot at during his whole life, that is, to 'study to be approved of God'. For seeing there is no workman who does not long to be praised for his work (it is a common instinct in us all to seek to be approved), the Apostle informs and admonishes Timothy what sort of approval he must seek, at whose hands he shall seek it, and in what way he shall gain it.

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I The kind of approval pastors should seek

The sort of approbation we are to seek must be spiritual and godly, flowing from the Spirit of God and not from flesh and blood. As it must flow from the Spirit of God, so we must seek it only at the hands of God and not of any other. We must study to be approved of him.

God's approval

Why? Suppose men approve you, you are not then more approved. For if you, in the absence of praise from others, should praise yourself, you are never a hair the better. 'If a man honour himself, his honour is worth nothing' (John 8). And he whom men commend 'is not approved' (2 Cor. 10:1), but only he who is commended by God. Therefore, let us not seek honour one from another, but let us seek the honour that comes from God only and to be approved of him.

Man's approval

When we get God's approbation, we shall get two other commendations. If God approves us, he shall make our own conscience approve us. And if our own conscience and God within our conscience approve us, we have two of the best. For these two will never leave us; they will stand by us here on earth. Then when we come before a higher tribunal they will make us blithe.

The kirk's approval

As to the third sort of approval which is by men, where these two go before, we shall get the kirk of God (no doubt) and good men to approve us. For where God and conscience call a man inwardly, God makes his kirk ratify his calling outwardly, as we see he commands the kirk to separate Paul and Barnabas to the work to which he called them inwardly. So, when we get his approbation we shall get all three.

Therefore, let us look for no other approval but his. We look to his approbation when we look to himself. He honours us when we honour him. When we seek nothing but him, then he seeks us and our good. It is far better

for us that he seek our good than that we ourselves seek it, for he seeks it best. Therefore let us seek God and his honour, and leave our honour entirely to him. When we consider who has sent us forth, who employs us, who made us Christ's ambassadors, we will conclude that we ought to study to please none but him. We shall render account to none but him.

II The Pastor and his work

The Apostle shows us we must do two things to win divine approval. First, we must study to have a solicitous care to present ourselves to him: second, that we study to present our work of ministry to him; as Paul says, 'Study to show yourself approved to God' and again, '...a workman who does not need to be ashamed.' So we are to be both good Christians and good pastors.

The pastor's own life

There is no standing before God but in purity of heart, for it is the pure heart that looks upon God and stands before him. The heart is only purged by faith. So it is by faith alone that we stand and present ourselves to God. To be approved, the good pastor must study to increase both faith and sanctification. For he shall never teach with authority and power except he knows in himself what he longs to work in others. How shall he press to sanctify others who is not sanctified himself? How shall he teach holily who is not holy? So we must study to our own personal sanctification to ensure as we teach salvation to others we are not reprobates ourselves.

The pastor's work

We must also study to present our works and how we have travailed before him. That is, we must study to show ourselves good pastors as well as good Christians. To this effect he lets us see what qualities are required of us to do the part of a pastor. First of all, he shows us that we must not be idle, for the ministry is work and not idleness. Because men may work with a wrong attitude and in the wrong way, he exhorts we must be workmen

‘who need not be ashamed’, that is, workmen without reproof.

There is a third thing: the pastor must be a skilful workman that can cut and work rightly. At the end of the verse he shows whereupon he shall work and wherein he shall toil and that is upon the word of truth. Because none of this can be done without great labour, he bids him study them all.

To come back to the point that we must be workmen and not idlers, the apostle says in 1 Thes.5:12, ‘I pray you to acknowledge these that labour among you and have them in great estimation for their work’s sake’. So the ministry is a work, and we are workmen.

III Ruling and teaching

The work of ministry stands in two points: ruling and teaching. For ruling, we have 1 Thes.5:12, ‘...and rule you in the Lord’. For teaching, 1 Tim.5:17 lets us see that they must ‘labour in the Word’. Because it is possible to work in the wrong attitude of mind and even to labour diligently but in the wrong way, he enjoins that we be such workmen ‘as need not be ashamed’, that is, worthy workmen without reproof. For the ministry is a worthy work (1 Tim.3:1).

Ruling as Christ ruled

Ruling rightly means ruling ‘in the Lord’. That means to rule spiritually in spiritual affairs as the Lord himself did. To rule ‘in the Lord’ does not mean to rule as a lord, for ‘we preach Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves your servants for his sake’. We therefore rule under the Lord as servants, as he was a servant. He came not to do his own will, but his Father’s will who sent him. As the Lord ruled not after his own will, far less must we rule after our wills. We must lay aside our wills and follow the will of God only. Many determinations flow from men’s wills, but they must be laid aside. Even the will of the monarch outwith the warrant of God’s Word can have no more power to strike the conscience than the Pope’s edicts. God’s will is perfect and good and holy (Rom.12:2).

Further, to rule as the Lord ruled, the pastor must rule carefully and diligently.

The Lord said it was his food and drink to do the Father’s will. So we must be careful to prefer his work over any work of our own, even though it may concern the most intimate matters pertaining to ourselves.

To move us to diligence, we should remember that we have the city of God to watch over; we have the spouse of Christ to present as a pure virgin; we have the lambs of Christ committed to our feeding. In that threefold repetition of our Master, bidding Peter feed his lambs, what was required but diligence? Who is able to answer to the meanest of these things? And yet I have not spoken of half of the things that are requisite. On the one hand, I marvel there are many loath to put their shoulders under so heavy a burden. Yet on the other hand, it remains a great marvel that any should be found that can take upon themselves so weighty and difficult a work. So much so, whoever may aspire to this task unsent will never do any good in his work.

Teaching skilfully

As the pastor must rule rightly so he must teach skilfully. The apostle bids pastors divide the word, and divide it aright. The form of words he uses I take to be borrowed and alludes to the family’s bread, comparing the Word to household bread and us to stewards who are dividers of that bread. As it is required in any steward of a great family that he be discreet in such a way that he has respect to each person’s age, ability and needs so as to apportion to them accordingly, so in us who are dispensers of this blessed Word there is a special kind of dexterity needed, that is, a gift of discretion whereby we may skilfully and fruitfully divide the Word to each one.

Whoever would act as a skilful teacher must be a faithful interpreter and a skilful applier. He must take care to attend to three things before anything else. First, to ascertain and understand as near as possible the true meaning of the writer. In order to do this he must first study what the words signify; he must test their meaning and then gather the interpretation the words will carry. For if he reaches a wrong understanding of the words of scripture, or attributes to them

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his flock*

some other meaning they do not have, he becomes a perverter of the Word.

Second, in order to see if the meaning he has arrived at is right, he must compare his text with other parts and places of Scripture, to see how it agrees with the ongoing message of God. If he finds his interpretation harmonises, most likely he has the true sense.

The third thing he must do is to note how the words of his text are placed and in what order they come and how they relate to the context—what has gone before and what follows.

Sufficiency of scripture

But he that would interpret truly must chiefly take heed to the Scriptures, for all true interpretations must be sought out of the Scriptures. Seeing that all truth is contained in the Scriptures, there can be no true interpretation but that which flows from them. Men should never turn to their own inventions if they cannot find what they want in the Scriptures. For no man should use a lie to interpret a truth; for the words of men, without Scripture, are only lies and vanities.

Also if the interpreter would have sensitivity (as he ought and should), of force he must use Scriptures. He must compare one place with another place, for some truth which he finds obscurely spoken in one place he will find it more clearly spoken in another. Therefore many Scriptures are necessary, and he that would interpret truly, must have many Scriptures in his memory: Therefore we should pray for holy memories, for our old memories will not keep these things: they must be sanctified memories that will keep holy things.

Applying scripture

As he must be a faithful interpreter, so he must be a skilful applier, for he must 'divide the word aright'. It is not enough simply to apply unless he apply skilfully. So skilful application is necessary. It is not possible to feed upon food, except it be applied to our mouths. Likewise, it is not possible that our souls can feed except spiritual food be applied. If the food be applied to any other part but the mouth the application serves nothing; likewise in spiritual things. If they

be not applied to the right parts, and to the right diseases, the application may do them more harm than good. Therefore, it is necessary that he who would do the part of a skilful applier know the faults and diseases of his flock, which is not possible in this town, except it were divided into parishes that every one might have a reasonable number that look to him and he were acquainted with and accustomed to their manners and behaviour.

Thus application is a chief point of the pastor's office, for there is no edifying beside it; there is no obedience to God without it; and, therefore as by interpretation he informs the mind, and makes it understand what should or should not be done, so by application he should subdue the will, that it may give obedience and follow the understanding.

Candidates for the ministry

Then in a word, we see that the gifts of government and of exhortation are necessarily requisite to be in a pastor in some measure. Indeed no one can be a pastor except he have at least something of both these gifts. Therefore you must take heed to your admission. In admitting young men, you should see how they have profited in both these gifts; and that act passed in the last Assembly should be taken seriously, and none be placed in this office except he have drunken in by time the gift of government, together with the gift of teaching, in some measure.

And as for application, it is so necessary, if it were no more but to turn over the very words of the text upon the hearer, it must not be omitted. Indeed, the nearer that we go to God's Word, the application is so much the better for his Word must aye have a greater force with it than any other word. And when the people hear that it is God speaking and not man, it strikes a great reverence in their hearts. So much the more when we consider the worthiness and dignity of the subject on which we ought to take these pains and entreat men.

Reverence, humility and painful travail

The Apostle calls it here 'the Word of

truth'. The more notable any subject is, the more wisely should it be handled. We have not such a notable subject as this, for there is not a subject that has these epithets, to be called sound, healthsome, holy, and true but this. Indeed, beside this there is neither health, soundness, truth, nor holiness. Therefore we should not chop nor change the Word, as if it were a vain Word. Rather with great reverence and humility it should be handled.

Who is able to do these things or to answer to the meanest part of them? These things demand accuracy and diligence, singular care and painful travail. They are not gained by sluggishness; nor will they allow us to be employed in other matters. Rather they demand the whole man and that the ministry of the Word be the one great thing in which he engage. That is why the apostle uses the word 'study', showing that these things are not come by without study, that is, without solicitous care and utmost diligence.

Praying in the Spirit

All this can be summed up in two words: ourselves and our office. If we study in faith and in a good conscience, there is no doubt but that we shall take heed to ourselves and to our calling. But these two we cannot keep unless we study also a third, I mean the One who guards all these treasures, namely, the Holy Spirit. We must study to entertain and cultivate Him. This will be done mainly by praying in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should be acquainted with prayer, and be instant in it, that the Lord will not withdraw His Spirit from us but rather increase his power in us day by day, that we may find by experience and by a genuine assurance, the truth of his heavenly promises within ourselves, especially that promise of everlasting life. It is to this life that Christ Jesus, the great Pastor of the sheep, who gave his life for the flock, will bring us! To him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all honour, praise and glory for ever. Amen.

Endnote

- 1 Bruce is referring to Patrick Adamson, the late Bishop of St Andrews

Christian Meditation

**Rev. Nigel Westhead, Minister of East
Hull Presbyterian Church**

From where I am standing in evangelical churches in England there has been and still is a lot said on the matter of what has been termed 'heart religion'. In broad terms, this emphasis points up the importance of not knowing only the truth of God in an academic or intellectual manner, but of engaging with God through his truth, in a way that affects us at the level of the heart, rousing our affections for God and inflaming us in his service. It is the opposite of a cold, dead, nominalism of which Evangelicalism, it seems, is just as capable as Liberalism.

But how do the truths of God's Word find their way from our heads to our hearts? One forgotten way, prominent in the Bible and Christian biography, but much neglected in the contemporary scene is via meditation. We probably link this more readily with the practice of

the eastern religions than with Christianity, but there is such a thing as Christian and Bible-based meditation too.

Reflecting on this theme from a biblical perspective throws up the answer to at least four important questions.

What is meditation?

Some light can be shed on this question by considering the etymology of the principal words used in the Bible. As far as the Old Testament is concerned it seems that there are basically two words to consider (*hagah* and *siach*) both of which are translated into English by, among other terms, the word 'meditate' and its associated words. Interestingly enough the word *hagah* according to Gesenius¹ means 'to speak with oneself, murmuring and in a low voice, as is often done by those who are musing'. The biblical idea of meditation then includes the thought of talking to yourself notwithstanding the consternation of those who, eavesdropping, think that a doctor ought to be summoned quickly! Listen to Martin Luther,²

You should meditate not only in your heart but also outwardly, repeating and comparing the actual, literal words in the book, reading and re-reading them with careful attention and thought as to what the Holy Spirit means by them.

A greater feel for the word is gained by a quick glance at the translations offered by the NIV for example. Amongst these are, 'conspire' (Ps. 2:1); 'plot' (Ps. 38:12); 'muse' (Ps. 39:3 AV); 'weighs' (Prov. 15:28); 'wail' (Isa. 16:7); 'growls' (Isa. 31:4); 'ponder' (Isa. 33:18); 'mutter' (Isa. 59:3); 'moan' (Jer. 48:31). These terms indicate that the realm we are in here is one which includes the thought processes (as suggested by 'ponder', 'weigh', 'muse' etc.), but which also indicates that these thought processes are closely entwined with the feelings of the heart (as suggested by 'wail', 'moan', 'growl' etc.). In fact the heart, not only the mind,³ might be said to be the principal faculty operative in meditation and so we read,

'My heart mused [*siach*] and my spirit enquired' (cf. Ps. 77:6; also Pss 19:14; 39:3).

Meditation is, then, not the same as study. It is a dwelling upon and a 'chewing over' what one has mined out through hard study. Robert L. Dabney⁴ says of meditation that it is not 'the mental bustle of investigation, but the dwelling of the thought upon the *ascertained* perfections of God....' Of course this relationship between the rational and affective faculties to meditation is one of emphasis. Meditation does involve thought, it is not an irrational emptying of our minds as in eastern concepts of meditation. But it does involve more than the mind. Its design is 'the raising of the heart to holy affections'.⁵ Edmund P. Clowney⁶ has laid bare this connection in a profound way,

Meditation does not differ from reasoning by being irrational, nor from connected thought by being disconnected impressions. But meditation is the form of thought that is appropriate to revealed mystery. If mystery were not revealed, thought about it would be impossible; if it were not mystery in its depth, continuing meditation would not be necessary.

What am I supposed to meditate on?

The scriptures offer to us a variety of themes for meditation. Amongst the objects of our meditation the Bible includes God's law (Josh. 1:8), God himself (Ps. 63:3); God's works and deeds (Ps. 77:12); God's righteousness and his praises (Ps. 35:28); what is just and true (Ps. 37:30; Prov. 8:7); God's decrees (Ps. 119:23); God's promises (Ps. 19:148); God's splendour and majesty (Ps. 145:5); God's mighty deeds (1 Chron. 16:19); God's wonders (Ps. 119:27). Probably what is most obvious about this list is the gravity of the subjects. The implication seems to be that we are not to meditate on the 'small talk' of scripture.

It may be interesting (to some anyway!) to think about what Paul and his

companions threw overboard to prevent themselves being shipwrecked as they were tossed up and down in Adria (Acts 27:27ff.). Such an object of meditation is hardly likely, however, to produce that combustion of heart spoken of by the Psalmist and enjoyed by those on the Emmaus road to whom Jesus revealed himself! For our hearts to be 'strangely warmed' we must mull over 'the infinities and immensities' of God's words and deeds. Here are a few suggestions from the Puritan Thomas Watson.⁷

Watson says we should meditate on God's attributes, God's promises, the love of Christ, sin, the vanity of the creature, the excellency of grace, our spiritual estate, the paucity of them that shall be saved, final apostasy, death, the day of judgement, hell, heaven, eternity, our experiences. From this list it does also appear that the power and blessing of meditation lie not in the technique, but in the content, the truth in itself.

How do I go about meditation?

A number of hints are thrown out in scripture to help us.

First, get some quiet! Isaac went out to a field (Gen. 24:63) and David meditated alone on his bed (Ps. 63:3).

Second, find your best time. To meditate profitably does require time. If you ask how much time, then Watson answers, 'If when a man is cold you ask how long he should stand by the fire? Sure, till he be thoroughly warm, and made fit for his work.' This of course could be a shorter or longer period, but Watson⁸ notes that Gerson reported of himself that he was often three or four hours before he could work his heart into a spiritual frame!⁹

Carving out great chunks of time is not the only way to meditate however. The Psalmist speaks often of how he meditated 'day and night' by which he presumably does not mean that he did nothing but lie in bed all day! No, he means that he had cultivated the ability to turn his thoughts naturally to spiritual matters even as he engaged in 'the daily round and the common task'. For most of us, David's practice is somewhat

less intimidating than Gerson's!

Third, memorise scripture.

Fourth use your hymn book (or psalm book) to guide you and stir you up to heavenly themes; and if you really can't sing, then perhaps you better had meditate in a field rather than in bed!

Fifth, whilst I cannot find any biblical examples of group meditation, I think it is the sort of activity that could be done well and helpfully in such a setting. 'Iron sharpens iron so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend'.

Finally, learn to ask questions of the text you have chosen for meditation. Edmund Clowney for example has a stimulating question for meditation in connection with John 3:16: 'Why does John 3:16 not read, "For God so loved his only Son that he gave him the world"?' Interrogating the text helps us to chew over its content and 'suck out the quintessence'¹⁰ of its life giving vitamins.

What's the point of meditation anyway?

The Psalms in particular give us some indication of the effects and benefits that meditation brings. In the first instance, and in accord with the psalms' emphasis on the heart, it is with a view to rousing the affections that meditation is to be engaged in. Thomas Watson¹¹ comments in typical puritan style, 'Meditation is the bellows of the affections.... It is the proper work of meditation to excite and blow up holy affections.' So David, in a manner reminiscent of John Wesley's Aldersgate

experience, testifies that through his meditations, his heart 'grew hot within' him and as he meditated 'the fire burned' (Ps. 39:3).

Meditation and passion are thus closely linked. But the passions once roused, constrain the will to action. David's 'hot heart' bubbled over into zeal for prayer—'then I spoke with my tongue: "show me O Lord..."' (Ps. 39:3f.). Not infrequently 'prayer' translates the Hebrew term *siach* (e.g. Pss 55:17; 64:1); and so *meditation* and *prayer* are joined together. The Lord's words to Joshua (1:8) underline clearly the purpose of meditation as being a means to obedience—'so that you may be careful to do everything written in it [i.e. the Law]'. It appears then, that *meditation* and *piety* go hand in hand.

It almost goes without saying that particularly in the context of the Psalms *meditation* and *praise* are bound as a bundle together—'My tongue will speak (*siach*) of your righteousness, and of your praises all day long' (Ps. 35:28; cf. also 1 Chron. 16:9; Pss 19:14; 105:2; 145:1-5).

The point of all this is to show that meditation is the key to fostering what we have already designated as 'heart religion'. It is via meditation that we come to savour true religion consisting as it does in 'delight' (Ps. 1:2); 'joy' (Ps. 63:6f.); 'understanding' (Ps. 49:3; 119:97ff.); 'rejoicing' (Ps. 104:34); 'sighing' / 'complaint' (Ps. 77:3); 'moaning' (Jer. 48:31). These texts correlate *meditation* and *power*—the power of true religion, or to use the title of Thomas Scott's work, *The Force of Truth*. Medita-

tion is the plug to the deafening hollow ring and gossamer thin depth of much modern evangelical experience.

Thomas Watson's¹² comments are apposite again, 'It gives us a true account why there are so few good Christians in the world; namely because there are so few meditating Christians... so much of the vitals and spirit of religion lies in it'. If this is so then we all ought to heed with more fervour the Apostle's word, 'meditate on these things...' (1 Tim. 4:15).

Endnotes

- 1 W. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, Baker Book House, 1847. Reprint Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979.
- 2 Quoted by P. Toon, 'Doing Theology by Meditation', *Evangel*, 9:3, 1991, p. 25.
- 3 In the Old Testament, 'heart' includes mind, will and emotions and is used of the whole personality.
- 4 R.L. Dabney, *Discussions of Robert Louis Dabney*, 1891, Banner of Truth reprint, Edinburgh, 1982, Vol. 1, p. 645f. Emphasis mine.
- 5 T. Watson, *The Sermons of Thomas Watson*, Soli Deo Gloria reprint, Ligonier, PA, 1990, p. 200f.
- 6 E.P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, IVP, Leicester, 1978, p. 29.
- 7 *Op. cit.* pp. 204-238.
- 8 *Op. cit.* p. 245.
- 9 The word 'frame' means a condition or frame of the mind.
- 10 *Op. cit.* p. 246.
- 11 *Op. cit.* p. 254.
- 12 *Op. cit.* pp. 240 and 243.

'This is my commandment that you love one another' (John 15:12)

Our whole duty is contained in these words, 'Love one another'. Therefore St Paul says, 'He who loves another fulfils the whole law'. So it appears that all things are contained in this word 'love'. This love is a precious thing; our Saviour says, 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another.'

So Christ makes love his cognizance, his badge, his livery. Every lord commonly gives a livery to his servants, whereby they may be known that they pertain to him, so

we may say, 'Yonder is this lord's servants because they wear his livery'. Our Saviour, who is the Lord above all lords, would have his servants known by their liveries and badge, which badge is love. Whosoever is endued with love and charity is his servant; such a one we may call Christ's servant. For love is the token whereby we may know such a servant pertaineth to Christ. Love may be called the very livery of Christ.

Bishop Hugh Latimer (1485-1555)

Preaching

Expository Preaching

The substance of an address given at the RTSF, New College, Edinburgh in January 1995 by the Rev. George Philip, minister of Sandyford Henderson Memorial Church, Glasgow

We may assume that preaching deals with the Bible, but that is a dangerous assumption. A vacancy committee of a well-established congregation, looking for a new minister, decided that they would not want a minister who preached from the Bible every Sunday. What they expected the minister to preach from on other occasions was not stated. In true ministry the Bible must be foundational. To that end the preacher must have complete confidence in, and be in submission to, the Scriptures as the Word of God. Without these two basic elements no one can be a true preacher.

The need for expository preaching

An illustration may help to set the context and highlight the need for biblical preaching. The story in Acts 8:26-35 tells of a good, religious, earnest, intelligent man, having travelled far to share in a significant religious occasion, now returning home. Reading the Scriptures, no doubt seeking after both God and truth, he was perplexed. God's messenger was sent and asked him the question, 'Do you understand what you

are reading?' The reply was one echoed by many in our churches today, 'How can I understand unless someone guides and explains it to me?'

Many preachers misjudge the people in their congregations. Sometimes they assume wrongly that they already know and understand their Bibles; sometimes they assume they are incapable of understanding biblical truth; sometimes they think the people in the pews do not really want to know and have no hunger. Too often 'the hungry sheep look up and are not fed'.

The second illustration concerns a leading churchman in one of the historic denominations. During an official visit he was deploring unbalanced and extreme attitudes to Scripture, maintaining that this was doing great harm to the church. But when he was challenged that the real problem in the church today was the appalling ignorance of Scripture, after a bit of pressure he reluctantly agreed. This ignorance is of course because, for a long time, preaching Sunday by Sunday simply has not been in any real sense expository.

A closed book

The attitude of many preachers is expressed in an affirmation made in one

series of the Warrack Lectures on preaching. The theologian giving the lectures made the astonishing statement: 'After all, the pulpit is hardly the place for systematic instruction. That should be reserved in the main for the small groups and classes which supplement private Bible Study. Any formal learning imparted by the preacher is purely incidental. The object of Public Worship is not to educate; it is to glorify God, and to establish that divine-human contact of which we have already spoken in a previous lecture.'

The Bible to many, inside the church as well as in the generality of non-church-going society, is virtually a closed book. This is true of the adult generation and frighteningly true about teenagers and children, many of whom have only heard the name of Jesus Christ as a swear-word.

As we address ourselves to preaching we have to recognise and accept that it has to be carried out in the context of ignorance, indifference, denial and opposition. The denial and opposition are becoming more open in our generation, and one of the significant elements in the media is the very open deriding and devaluing of all things Christian, especially anything biblical. This situation is similar to that experienced by the apostles in their day, and in that context their ministry was simply and persistently that they reasoned out of the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus did the same with the demoralised disciples on the road to Emmaus. From the Old Testament he expounded the truth concerning himself and his work of salvation (Lk. 24:25-27, 44).

For us, the whole range of Scripture is our remit—the Old and New Testaments held in coherent balance, keeping back nothing, believing that it takes a whole Bible to preach a whole Christ. *Preach the Word*: that is the call.

What is Preaching?

What then is preaching? It is not lecturing. Nor is it being deliberately provocative. Nor is it self-indulgent theorising. At my own Induction nearly forty years ago the minister giving the

charges leaned over the pulpit and said, 'Brother, keep your doubts to yourself. Tell your people what is true.' That counsel I have tried to follow. There is a carnal satisfaction, often camouflaged as intellectual integrity, in raising questions and leaving people baffled. It may make the preacher feel clever but it leaves people confused. No-one listening to us should be interested in, and certainly not impressed by, what we do *not* believe!

Preaching, in order fully to be a means of grace, must be set in the context of worship. The service must be a complete whole leading the people to God in adoration, praise and prayer, preparing them to hear God's Word, and enabling them after the preaching of the Word to express their response in the words of a carefully chosen psalm or hymn.

Proclamation

In this context there are certain elements of expository preaching that have to be kept clearly in mind. There must be *proclamation* by those speaking as heralds of God, declaring the greatness, goodness and perfection of what God has done in the work of salvation through Jesus Christ his Son. I can still recall the thrill of my soul as I read the book *Heralds of God* by James S. Stewart, even though at that time I had no thoughts of the ministry.

Instruction

As part of the proclamation there must be *instruction*. We are to teach the people, leading them into the truth of God's Word, line upon line, precept upon precept, refusing to be confined to superficial 'blessed thoughts', but facing up to serious spiritual issues, and leading people on from the ABC of the gospel into the 'meat' of the Word. This is not just imparting information or developing knowledge. It is a satisfying of the hunger of the soul for the bread of life and, at the same time, the creating of a deeper hunger.

Of course, if our preaching makes the people hungry for more, then the preacher will have to work even harder in preparation. The food of the Word has to be well prepared and well pre-

sented, just as we expect and hope that at home the food for our bodies will be well prepared and nourishing. There is no excuse for serving up solid, indigestible chunks of systematic theology. Preachers need to be aware that one of the first things obvious to congregations, often long before sermons are preached, is whether or not their ministers are prepared: both in their own souls as messengers of God's Word, and also in their material so they do not lapse into meaningless clichés.

Preaching is not a detached exercise, and theology must not be left floating in mid-air. It has to be 'earthed', applied in a spiritual and practical way to people's lives, needs and problems. Preaching the Word of God has to do with the realities of life in a world that is fallen and disordered.

Exhortation and Application

As well as *proclamation* and *instruction*, there must also be *exhortation* and *application* so that 'they who know their God will be strong and get on with it,' as Daniel 11:32 has been translated. The effect of true preaching is to call for and enable the obedience of faith.

Exhortation must always be on the basis of truth preached. The call to live a life of holiness taken on its own could crush and dishearten. Christians need often to be reminded of what God has provided. 'Think what Spirit dwells within you.' The possibilities are limitless because God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3).

Encouragement

The other vital element in biblical preaching is that of *encouragement*. There is a kind of expository preaching that hammers and crushes people with the Bible, making the dominant note sin rather than salvation. Of course we must preach about sin, and about judgement, but the great safety in expository preaching and working systematically through Bible books is that, over a period of years, the whole range of truth is preached in biblical proportion and balance. Encouragement, inspiration and enablement go together and people begin to thrill to

the reality of salvation and life.

What is Expository Preaching?

This leads on naturally to the theme of *exposition*. On one occasion I listened to a famous evangelical Bible teacher dealing with a passage of Scripture. After the meeting was over a fellow minister said, 'That was the exegesis; where was the exposition?' We had listened to a book of the Bible being dissected in a masterly way. The whole framework had been laid out, the sections and sub-sections were meticulously explained, but our souls had not been fed. We must recognise that for preaching (which is different from giving a theological lecture), the technical work is done in the study and we must not try to impress with our scholastic ability.

Spiritual food

When we go home after a day's work we are not likely to be impressed by a lecture about the calorific and nutritional value of certain ingredients. We need a meal! Likewise our congregations need to be fed with the bread of God. To change the illustration, some in spiritual infancy need milk but others, working hard, need strong meat. True biblical exposition will, by the Holy Spirit, provide for both needs. In the early years of my ministry I was encouraged and challenged by the words of a foreman joiner, who had recently come to faith, who said, 'I have to take in enough on a Sunday to keep me going for a whole week where I work.'

Definition

The dictionary defines exposition as 'setting out to public view in terms of explanation'. To do this we need to be systematic, balancing Old and New Testaments, opening up to the people the sections of Scripture we call Law, History, Prophets and Psalms, dealing with both Gospels and Epistles, but always mindful of the stage people are at and of their needs. We are to expose the Scriptures, laying out Scripture so that it speaks for itself.

There are, of course, dangers and we

make mistakes. This is one reason why we must always be 'learners'. When I have the chance to be in a congregation I watch very carefully how the minister handles the whole service, what items of praise he has chosen, and how he deals with the passage of Scripture. One learns much by watching.

Hobby-horses

Some of the dangers can be highlighted. There are those who have said, 'First get your systematic theology right and then go to the Scriptures.' That is simply saying that we make up our minds what the difficult passage should say and then we go and impose our answers on it. But this sets our reasoning above the Bible. There are preachers who have a stable of hobby-horses, be it the Holy Spirit, judgement or prophecy and, no matter where they start in Scripture, after a few 'flutters' by way of introduction they fly like homing pigeons to their favourite theme.

On one occasion I listened to an excellent sermon on justification by faith. The doctrinal teaching could not be faulted but the passage of Scripture the preacher was dealing with simply did not have as its basic theme justification by faith.

Complete books of the Bible

Some preachers are very selective, and you can tell a great deal about them by what they *never* preach. The example of Paul is one we should all consider and follow. At the end of his ministry he could say that he had taught the whole counsel of God and had kept back nothing that was profitable. He did not do it all in one sermon! After all we need to have mercy on our congregations, and sometimes if we had stopped ten minutes earlier the people would have benefited more.

It is an immense challenge to deal comprehensively with the whole of Scripture, dealing with complete books of the Bible, having regard to content, so that sometimes we deal verse by verse and at other times more generally.

Shorter series

Sometimes we should break off a long series of studies in a particular book to do a series on subjects such as the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Heroes of the Faith in Hebrews 11, or studies in the Disciples. Whatever we are doing, we are enjoined in Scripture not to handle God's Word with wisdom of words lest the message be made powerless (1 Cor. 2:3-5). A display of what we consider to be our cleverness may impress people but will not benefit them. Indeed, we may well rob God's Word of its power.

What is our objective?

Do we want to impress, and if so whom do we want to impress? A simple dedicated believer said on one occasion, 'When you use one of these big theology words the Lord says to me, "It's all right, you don't need to understand that word"'. The searching question for me was simply, 'Why was I using that kind of word without explaining it?' We need to remember that the people to whom we are sent to preach the Word are precious to God and must be valued as such and dealt with worthily.

Jesus wept

A cartoon in an old Punch magazine portrayed a vicar addressing the curate: 'Young man, kindly stop referring to the congregation as the opposition.' Of course some do resist, oppose and refuse the Word of God, no matter how graciously it may be preached. But even then we must realise it is the god of this world who has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:4). If we have this clear in our thinking it will often keep us from becoming exasperated by people and it will ease the hurt of their attitudes and words to us. Remember that Jesus wept over people like that (Lk. 19:41) and saw them as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

Lowliness and love

We must never 'speak down' to the congregation. Who are we to give the impression that we are superior? We must never give the impression that we know it all. We are not fountains of wis-

dom nor are we God's gift to the church. We are learning together and yet we are called to teach, preach, lead and give an example. We must love the people God has sent us to and we must make plain that we do love them and that we need their love and prayers.

Prayer support

The longer one is in the ministry the more one realises just how much the faithful prayers of the people are needed. It moves the heart to realise that some pray on for us in spite of everything we do or fail to do. Where would some of us in the ministry be without a committed group of praying people who, for Jesus' sake, are our partners in the gospel? Only foolish and over-confident preachers do not make it their business early in their ministry to encourage such prayer partners.

It is instructive and challenging to see in Scripture the clear basic connection between preaching and prayer. In Ephesians 6:19-20, in the context of spiritual warfare, Paul asks prayer for *utterance* (RSV), so that he might preach the gospel as he ought to do. In Colossians 4:3-4 the emphasis is on prayer providing the *open door* for the

Word preached—the prayers of the people pushing back the barriers and opening the doors of hearts and minds. In 2 Thessalossians 3:1 prayer is asked that *the Word might run free* (RSV). In Exodus 17:8-12, the story of Aaron and Hur *upholding* Moses in prayer while the battle went on in the valley is one of the most vivid illustrations of the significance of prayer in relation to the ongoing work of God. Never think and never let anyone say that preaching is a 'one-man band'.

Who are the hearers?

We never know who will be there in the congregation. Nor do we know their needs or hungers, their battles, resentments and reactions to how life has dealt with them. There will be those at all different stages of life, people of long Christian experience and none. And there will be people of different intellectual capacities. But all of that should thrill us with expectation and fill us with a sense of responsibility. What we must remember is the fact of the unfettered operation of the Holy Spirit.

It is on this level that preaching is delivered from mere professionalism or

performance. We are involved with God in the declaration of His Word, aware that it is only by the proclaiming and the hearing of the Word that faith emerges (Rom. 10:11-17).

- If we allow Scripture to speak for itself

- if we see to it that we use biblical language and categories, going as far as Scripture goes on any subject and then stopping, refusing to extrapolate on the grounds of mere logic

- if we really believe the Word is God-given and is profitable on every level, making people wise unto salvation

- if we believe God when he says that his Word will not return void but will accomplish what he has sent it to do (Isa. 55:8-11)

... then we will know the thrill and the privilege of expository ministry. We will find again and again, as Paul found in Philippi, that hearts have been prepared by God, and are opened up to receive the Word (Acts 16:13-15).

Let the final word be from Scripture: 'Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people... and they read clearly and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading' (Neh. 8:5-8). That is expository ministry.

A Faith to Proclaim

Today as never before there is being laid upon the heart and conscience of the Church the burden of evangelism. Other generations have had their own specific tasks: confessional restatement, theological reorientation, ecclesiastical reconstruction. Today the demand is more radical and basic. It is spiritual resurrection: it is—under God—the creating of life. To confront a bewildered and dishevelled age with the fact of Christ, to thrust upon its confusion the creative word of the Cross and smite its disenchantment with the glory of the Resurrection—this is the urgent, overruling task. 'Son of man, can these bones live?'

There is, therefore, no place today for a Church that is

not aflame with the Spirit who is the Lord and Giver of life, nor any value in a theology which is not passionately missionary. If there throbs through the Church the vitality of a living union with Christ—and apart from this the Church has no claim to exist, no right to preach, it is merely cumbering the ground—if the Church can indeed say 'It is not I who live, it is Christ who lives in me,' then the dark demonic forces of the age have met their match, and the thrust of life is stronger than the drift of death. A Church that knows its Lord and is possessed by its Gospel cannot but propagate creatively the life it has found. A Christian who is taking his faith seriously cannot but evangelize.

J.S.Stewart, 1953

How to Improve...

A word to those
in the pew
from
David Searle

When my own family were still at Primary School, our older boy came home one day all lit up. His news was that his class had just got a new teacher who had told them at the end of the first day that they were the best class she had ever had! When I tell you that the previous teacher had repeatedly told the children they were the worst class she had ever had, you will understand why our seven year old was so excited.

There is a vital principle there. It is the principle of positive encouragement. It applies to preachers as much as to anyone else. We all like a word of commendation, and the preacher is no exception.

It might be best to begin with a negative. There is an excessive, over-the-top 'encouragement' which is not at all helpful. It is foolish and immature to give glory to a minister. Some people idolise their minister and, hearing them speak, one might think they had called a super-person to the pastoral charge. God does not like that kind of excessive praise of people, and there is no question but that it both grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

On the other hand, encouragement to the preacher can be a powerful stimulation to renewed effort in the study. So

how can we encourage those entrusted with handling the word of life?

Encouragement by questions

An occasional question about a sermon can do wonders for the preacher. (I would strenuously advise against a regular list of twenty questions!) Every so often, to ask about some point that puzzled you will convey the signal, seldom heard by preachers, that someone in the congregation was not only listening, but is seeking to understand what was being said.

I recall a woman in a former congregation where I ministered who three times in the space of two years asked to see me to present a question to me that had arisen from the preaching. She was an intelligent woman, her husband was a Member of Parliament, and she herself was standing as a candidate at a forthcoming General Election. The stimulation to my thought and study from her questions was immense.

Encouragement by appreciation

When I ministered in rural Aberdeenshire, the people there were extremely reserved, very unlike the more extrovert folk of Ulster where I also ministered for eight years. In ten years, the only commendation I ever received for a ser-

mon in Aberdeenshire was a grave nod and the furtively whispered words, 'Very nice'.

Just a couple of sentences saying thank-you for a sermon, particularly if the second sentence can say *why* you found it helpful, can bring heart to the one who has had sweated and toiled to prepare and deliver the sermon. You may not realise it, but the same sermon may have elicited angry objections from someone else, and the discouragement of the irate objector needs to be balanced by the appreciation of the one helped. That has been my experience on countless occasions.

Encouragement by practical response

All the thanks in the world ultimately mean nothing unless there is also a practical response to the messages delivered from the pulpit. How often I have heard discouraged ministers lamenting that, after pouring out their hearts in the delivery of the sermon, the congregation has apparently remained as unchangingly obdurate as ever.

Indeed, in my own ministry, I have found that full obedience to God from his people is certainly the hardest thing of all to elicit. The congregation will respond to an appeal for funds for the organ or church roof. They will (reluctantly) agree to collect for Christian Aid. They will come along and support the

organisations' annual displays. But to obey God and take Jesus Christ seriously by adopting a Christian lifestyle and taking up the cross daily is infinitely rarer to see.

There is no other more powerful encouragement for any preacher than to see practical response to the messages from God's word. That is the final crunch in this matter of a ministry of encouragement to preachers.

Encouragement to attend courses

There are occasional seminars and conferences on preaching which ministers are invited to attend. Often, such occasions can bring a breath of fresh air into the minister's thinking. Helpful stimulation and new insights can produce renewed vigour in the ongoing weekly grind of sermon preparation.

Yet many ministers feel guilty about taking the time to attend such courses. They are afraid their elders, deacons or congregations will think they are 'taking time off'. They need to be actively encouraged to make the most of opportunities for this kind of in-service training for preaching. The fees (or part of them) for such courses could be paid from congregational funds. Most ministers would never ask for that kind of help. Yet it can be a most valuable investment for congregations and pays rich dividends through the minister's pulpit work. It needs members to be positive

and enthusiastic about ministers availing themselves of such opportunities.

Related to that, there are also journals published specially for preachers, with material designed to give help in sermon preparation. A former congregation of my own made me an annual gift of such a journal, and for all the years I was their minister, I derived insights and food for thought from this rather unusual gift of a quarterly ministers' journal.

A revived congregation

A young man once went as minister to a most barren parish. The truth was that the church ought to have been closed down. It was dying, bankrupt and a public disgrace. But after some months the tide began to turn. More people started attending, there was 'lift' in the services and some years later there came a flow of several dozen remarkable conversions.

Entirely unknown to that young man, an elderly lady, blind and bedridden, had set herself to pray for his preaching. In heaven, when the full story is known, there is no doubt in my mind that the breath of revival that came to that parish will be traced back, in divine providence, to an old lady's prayers. Though never once present to hear her new minister preaching, by her prayers she got the very best she ever could have done out of his sermons!

...your
minister's preaching

The second in a series of articles by Montagu Barker on Stress in the Ministry

Ministers' Expectation of their Ministry &

Expectation of Ministry

What expectation did you have of your ministry when you set out to train? What are your expectations now of how the Lord will work through you? What do you consider to be your forté? Do you have a secret day-dream? Have you a personal ambition, even fantasy, that niggles away somewhere in the back of your mind—probably nobody knows about it, least of all the person who knows you best—your wife? You may have only told yourself and you hardly admit to God that you have such a dream.

These expectations need to come into the open, certainly before God and also before some other friend we can trust. These fantasies often give a clue to that part of our motivations where failure to achieve makes us most vulnerable. Often we are not honest with ourselves. We deny these expectations, but we still day-dream about them from time to time.

Frustrated ambitions

Some hope to be specialists with young people but then find they lose their rapport as they grow older. Others hope to be great preachers but never have a church that gives them the needed scope. Yet others see themselves as competent counsellors, modern reformed pastors like Richard Baxter, spending fruitful time with people to help them. But they find that their parishioners bare their souls not to their minister, but to their GP, or their social worker.

Did you once dream of a famous pulpit? Of many conversions? Of a parish in renewal? Or were you going to be a great church planter? Yet God may have called you, not to greatness in human eyes, but to obscurity instead. You may have even become someone who closes down churches or amalgamates them rather than plants them! Remember that the Apostle John was arguably the greatest pastor in the New Testament. His writings convey an enormously sensitive pastoral heart. But God chose to send him away from his beloved people to the little island of Patmos.

The example of Elijah

We can learn from Elijah. There was no doubt about God's call to this man or his enabling of him. Yet after the triumph on Mount Carmel, he became profoundly depressed. 'I have had enough Lord...take away my life...I am no better than my ancestors...I have been very zealous for the Lord...I am the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too.'

God's first approach was to supply him with food, drink, rest and sleep, the very same physical treatments for depression we would use today. But then God took Elijah off to Mount Sinai for some psychotherapy and Elijah started talking and the underlying issues spilled out. He had come to rely on the spectacular and after a truly amazing demonstration on Carmel of rugged faith in God, he now slides into the snare of trusting in himself, not God.

Ministers' Backgrounds & Personalities

Earlier on he had had many miracles to give spectacular confirmation that God was really with him. But now the miracles were no longer coming and Jezebel was threatening his life. Feeling let down and forsaken by God, he fled. Is there also in his complaint that he is no better than the prophets before him a hint of a secret desire to excel and outdo others in his service for God? Perhaps there was a competitive streak in Elijah, a secret passion to serve God more effectively than others had done.

Previously, full of his own importance, Elijah had given little credence to the weak-kneed Obadiah who may have appeared to have compromised to keep his nose clean at Ahab's court (Elijah would appear to have no idea of what Obadiah had achieved as a servant of God in a high, civic position). He, Elijah, was the *only* man after God's heart. He confronted Ahab. He tackled the prophets of Baal single-handedly at Carmel while all the rest dithered or remained in hiding.

Then the miracles stopped and his expectation of the spectacular was shattered. It was then the power of Jezebel came home to him, and like Peter suddenly noticing the wind and waves, he took his eyes off God and forgot all that God had done for and through him.

In his zeal and subsequent 'low' he had distorted the facts. He had a plan in his mind of how things should happen based on his past experience and his day-dreams of personal importance. When it did not work out that way, he amended the

facts so that he could wallow in his self-pity more effectively before God. He felt that God had let him down. His expectations had not been fulfilled in quite the way he had wanted.

God had to use Elisha and two pagan kings to continue the work as we read in 1 Kings 19:15-17. Elijah's public ministry appears to have finished. Poor Elijah. Poor God—when Elijah failed!

How often I have seen this pattern in God's servants who have perhaps taken a wrong course or not fulfilled their own expectations. We do not read about them. Biographies are not written about failures, about those who do not fit into our stereotypes of success in the ministry, however much God may have been using them.

A fruitful 'failure'

William Chalmers Burns was one such 'failure' who is scarcely known today (although in my opinion his work and influence merit an up to date assessment). He was a Scot who gave up his career as a lawyer to train for the ministry in the 1830s. His father was a faithful and godly Church of Scotland minister who had preached in Kilsyth for forty years and seen little fruit. Then one sermon preached by William in 1839 brought dramatic revival. Hundreds of people were permanently changed in the following weeks. Notorious drunkards became sober. Wife batterers started caring for their wives and families. The whole community was transformed.

The local presbytery was so astonished that they set up a commission to investigate. The commission reported, 'We have looked at this...and find that truly the work is standing.' It was a remarkable work of God which profoundly affected that community for decades thereafter.

Later Burns preached for a few months in St Peter's, Dundee, the church of Robert Murray McCheyne, the most celebrated preacher in Scotland at that time, who had seen much blessing during his seven years there. In McCheyne's absence, another revival broke out during Burns' ministry within a few months which spread through Scotland and profoundly affected the Church there for the next fifty years.

During these short spells, William Burns reaped where others had sown. However, he became convinced he should obey his original call to China and there he served faithfully for twenty years, but saw very few converts. After his death, others reaped where he had laboured, vibrant churches being established in each centre where he had worked. Furthermore, he deeply influenced others who worked in inland China and was frequently consulted by Hudson Taylor over the founding of the China Inland Mission. Hudson Taylor said of Burns after his death, 'He was the holiest man I ever knew.' It was Burns who introduced Taylor to the inland of China and showed him how to live as a Chinese instead of as a westerner in China.

This apparently forgotten man was ultimately one of the most influential of all the China pioneers, one of God's great men. But in the eyes of the world his China ministry was a failure, a mistake and a waste of great gifts.

God's secret purposes

God may have very different ideas for us than those we started out with. Woe betide us if we carry our day-dreams and fantasies around with us like Elijah. God may not only give us no apparent blessing, he may even ask us to close down a work. General Booth is reported to have said 'God can often find men to start up a work; it is not so easy to find a man who will stop it when His need for it has ceased.' Many ministers, missionaries and church members are too attached to their work. They are vulnerable to depression should they become redundant in a spiritual or secular context.

There is a difference between a *day-dream* and a *vision*. The minister who has his own idea of what God is calling him to do must beware. Disillusionment lies in the way of *day-dreams* and personal expectations. *Vision* must always be open to scrutiny and should be shared with others for their criticism and

encouragement. We need that sober assessment all the time.

Background and Personality

We turn now to consider the impact on the ministry of a minister's family background and personality. The family is the laboratory of human relationships and functions. It is something God has ordained for us.

Personality problems

It is all too easy to stereotype a minister's behaviour and to set up a prototype of the ideal minister or minister's spouse. The problem is that nobody will fit that mould. We all have difficulties within our personalities, which we may denigrate as deviant and sinful. We may even exalt our personality quirks as a matter of principle.

Let me illustrate the kind of problem I have in mind. An early experience of bereavement is known to make people more prone to depression later in life. Such an early bereavement will 'prime' the way we look at life, so that we may be less able to withstand the stresses that come from loss and change. This priming will probably be present all our lives. Although God's grace can come into that area, it remains as a *fact* of our lives. We may turn that fact into a *problem*.

In the same way, it is known that the absence of a parent of the same sex, or an appropriate substitute during puberty can be associated with sexual and relationship problems in later life.

Clergy families are no more immune to such problems than any other families, but they may find it very difficult to come to terms with them. They may think that they should not be feeling like this, since they assume God ought to be changing the problem area.

I am not denying that God does work in our lives to produce in us more of the fruits of grace. However, it is quite foolish to deny that our genes, our culture and our habit formations do affect our personalities. They affect the way we relate to one another; that must include our marriage partners and those we work with in our parishes. They also affect the pattern of our ministries.¹

Men with strong passions

Take the Apostle Paul. There is an aggressive, thrusting aspect to his personality and his relationship with colleagues. There is a contentiousness in his personal allusions. Look at his tiffs with Peter, John Mark and Barnabas. However, he had strength

and independence for a pioneer apostle, freed from the ties of family. I wonder how Timothy regarded him and whether he was affected by the sheer force of Paul's personality? (Incidentally, wine is bad medicine for a nervous tummy.)

Or take John Wesley. He was strongly attached to his forceful mother. The mother who governed her children by the bell and taught them to cry silently. He derived much of his drive, discipline and tendency to over-organise from her. There is no doubt that his father was an ineffective man and that John had a rather special relationship with his mother. But he never coped well with women at a pastoral level. He was frequently getting into scrapes, and had to leave America because of difficulties there. His relationships with women were complex, and his own marriage was an extremely unhappy one. His wife was a very difficult woman but John either did not or could not see that. He was an insensitive, neglectful and very ambivalent husband, the sort of man who would have driven most wives spare.

By contrast Charles Wesley was completely uxorious. Besotted with his wife and family, he needed a good nudge from John now and then to get him back to work.

George Burton (formerly of the Mayflower Centre) is another example of a man shaped by his past experience for a God given role. Brought up in the grinding poverty of the slums of Glasgow, his life pattern was one of indiscipline, indulgence and violence. Yet despite his very difficult personality and nearly psychopathic relationships, following his conversion he was able to reach the pagan working classes of East London in a unique way. He found it immensely difficult to get on with his fellow workers at the Mayflower Centre. Because of his background, he left many scars on those to whom he reacted in an aggressive way, especially those whom he saw as his social superiors. Indeed, his biography was not only a biography but an exorcism of his abrasive impact which he left on his co-workers.²

Sober self-assessment

We need to see how this applies to our own lives in general and to the lives of ministers in particular. The danger is that these aspects and facets of our behaviour may not be recognised. Wrong diagnosis leads us into practical difficulties. Ministers may come to blame others for difficulties that are inherent in themselves. Not realising their own reactions they may think that it is the gospel that is being rejected when they find themselves at loggerheads with their congregations and

elders. What may have started out as a hidden personality clash becomes elevated into a defence of principle, and the more theological that principle is, the more rigid, righteous and entrenched their position becomes.

So it is important for ministers to recognise their foibles and take proper account of them. Otherwise these foibles may catch us out. But if we can recognise our problems then we have the opportunity to become more truly humble, more open to change, more able to accept help and more sensitive to the problems of others. In the same way part of the training of psychiatrists is to help them deal with their own personalities and backgrounds and see ways these could hinder them from helping and treating patients.

We need to acquire that 'sober assessment' of ourselves of which Paul speaks in Romans 12:3. If we can acquire a real, down to earth self-assessment, then it is possible for us to grow. We can become more sensitive to others, more truly humble and teachable ourselves. We can change, we can mature. In this way we will add to our personal resources and be better able to cope with crises in our lives and ministry.

Surely this is what the doctrine of regeneration is about. We all have our old family traumas, our faulty pattern of training, our faulted inheritance. But we do not have to cling to these old models of behaviour, to act out old instinctive drives. We have a new law, a new model, a new power—not that we are already perfect, but we press on for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.¹

Endnotes

- 1 To address more fully some of the issues raised, see my article on 'Psychological Aspects of Inner Healing' in *Pulpit & People*, Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 1986, pp 89-102.
- 2 Jean Hewitt, *George Burton, A Study in Contradictions*, Hodder & Stoughton

Ann Allen meets

Colin Sinclair, husband of Ruth, father of soon to be four children, has been the public face of SU Scotland for the past eight years. As he changes jobs and refocuses his energies on re-entering parish ministry we explored the areas in which God has used him.

Let's start at the very beginning. How did you find a faith in Christ?

As a 10 year old boy I went along to an SU camp thinking I could put up with the religious bit as long as the sport was there. The clear explanation of the gospel matched by the life of my group leader increasingly appealed to me and the talks became the highlight of the camp. I went back and somewhat self consciously at the age of 12 gave my life to Christ. At that stage my parents weren't regular church goers and so it was through SU that my faith was nurtured.

So right from the start SU played a major part in your life and you consciously continued that into adulthood?

Yes. In my student days you could just about survive on a grant which means vacations could be used for other kinds of service and Richard Gorrie suggested to me that I invest some of my time in serving SU during the summer. So six weeks of each summer I spent helping at camps, in a sense repaying all I had gained from them as a youngster.

Had you envisioned actually working for SU after graduation?

No, but at the end of my economics de-



gree SU did ask if I would consider going to work for them in Zambia. I had come to faith at camp and faith from the start enriched and touched all of my life. So it seemed right to share that through the work of SU.

How did a call to the ministry in the Church of Scotland follow on from that experience?

I had no great desire to become a minister, in fact my perception of the role turned me right off. I didn't like drinking tea or talking to old ladies! It was through my involvement in Christian Union at Stirling and through taking services there that people suggested I should consider ministry. But I felt I could be just as fruitful in a lay capacity.

What altered your perceptions and led to your call?

Reading Martyn Lloyd Jones and Spurgeon about the call of God to ministry and what that involved, I found

echoes in my own experience. I talked it over with my minister, George Philip, who wisely said 'Think about it and come back in a year'. In that year God confirmed His call to me so that I went out to Zambia knowing I would come back to study for the ministry.

In what way did your time in Zambia equip you for the ministry?

Being in another culture sets you free to discover what is really you—not what you have accrued through SU, Crusaders, CU, church or whatever. I also had enormous opportunities and responsibilities which I would never have had in Scotland at that time. It was also there that I first learned of the Lausanne movement. I remember their meeting in 1974 and reading from cover to cover their covenant statement 'Let the earth hear His Voice'. Probably that document shaped my theology more than anything else.

How would you summarise its influence?

It is a very important expression of what I regarded as a mature evangelicalism. It was masterminded largely by John Stott who himself was converted through SU and whose writing has been an enormously important influence in my Christian life. I have always marvelled at his ability to be faithful to the Bible and to take the contemporary world seriously. He above all others has held that in balance over the last forty years. I have been actively involved with the Lausanne movement ever since that initial intro-

Colin Sinclair

duction.

You spent eight years in ministry in Ayr. What were the main planks of your ministry style?

Obviously my main concerns were to handle the Bible faithfully and practically. I never wanted people to leave a service asking the question, 'So what?' I wanted that question to be answered whatever it was. I also wanted to be a preacher/pastor. I think sometimes evangelicals are negative about the role of pastor but I felt my pastoral contact with the congregation saved my preaching from being trite or glib because I was aware of people's problems as I handled the word with them and for them. I think contact between preaching and pastoring has been the thing I have missed most in my years in SU.

But despite your sense of fulfilment in a parish setting you found yourself responding to the invitation to be Mr SU Scotland?

Yes. I had no desire to leave the parish but I recognised, as did others I respected, that this job fitted my background, gifts, and experience. It was then I realised that it was in fact the only job that I would leave my congregation for. The challenge of falling youth statistics year after year and the opportunity to open up the Bible for people of every age seemed to me to be what exactly I wanted to give to the church and to Scotland. When the General Assembly agreed to give the Director of SU a seat on Presbytery that added hugely to my



sense of the rightness of the post for me.

Given all your past background in SU was there a sense of homecoming for you as you took up the post?

Very much so. I feel the whole vision of SU is that people should not only come to Christ but should grow in Christ and serve the Church. I felt I had been fulfilling that role as a parish minister. However, equally I could direct all my energies towards it in this post.

Having come from the ministerial role, how would you describe your managerial style as director?

I said to folk at the time that though the world of managerial skill was not foreign to me, if they were looking for a manager then I was not their man. However, if they were looking for someone who was a minister who would be able to make links with the churches, who would handle God's Word and have a pastoral concern for the folk in the work

then I would happily fill that role. SU asked me to come and develop SU's link with the CHURCH. That's why quite a lot of my work load has involved me with Church leaders, with Evangelical Alliance, Mission Scotland, The Bible Society, the Board of National Mission. I was encouraged to use what Bible teaching gifts I have not just on SU platforms but in other places made available to me. I do want to handle the Bible in a way that is exciting and relevant and helpful.

How have your pastoral gifts been utilised?

By nature I am a conciliator rather than a confronter. I have tried to help people to see SU as a kind of bridge builder between evangelical Christians from a variety of backgrounds and temperaments. So I have been involved in bringing different and differing people together and that has its difficulties and brings with it a certain amount of flak. The other hard area is the pressure that the lack of money forces upon the work but that would be true currently of all Christian Charities.

So how did the managerial aspects of the work devolve?

One of my key roles was to get the right people involved in responsible positions. I inherited a situation where department heads had autonomy to make decisions without having to get approval from the general director. So my role was more

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Ann Allen meets Colin Sinclair CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

akin to that of a Presbytery clerk, coming alongside people helping them to see how their role and decisions fitted in to the values of the movement and related to other parts of the movement. But it did not mean that the burden of all the initiatives fell on my desk which resulted in SU doing far more than I could ever handle on my own.

What do you think you have gained from these past eight years?

It's been a wonderful privilege to work with a variety of talented, committed and gifted individuals knowing that we are of one mind. One of the great strengths of SU is the calibre of the people involved. From volunteers right through to members of staff, their commitment is wonderful. It's been a tremendous stimulus to work with people with whom there have been no theological difficulties. We have differed in style, temperament, approach, vision, but have been totally at one in our approach to the Bible, the cross, discipleship. That enables us to engage in dialogue and in strong debate without any suspicion as to where people are coming from. I have found that enormously enriching. I've learned an awful lot from people all over Scotland whom I have had the privilege of meeting. It's been the best in-service course a Church of Scotland minister could have!

What do you think you have contributed most to SU over these years?

I think I have tried to embody the aims, beliefs, and values of SU. I have sought to pass that on right through the move-

ment. I have a continuing heart for evangelism and discipleship and my concern is that SU never takes the place of a church but fulfils a role helping people to do certain jobs whether that is evangelism, discipleship or opening up and explaining the Bible and I think I have focused on these. I have tried to avoid the twin perils of a Christian organisation which I see as vagueness and niceness. People do not give you resources to be vague or nice. We have to confront issues and challenge people to be the very best they can be for God. Over the years I have had the thrill of seeing people grow and become much more than they were for God. Others sadly have not. I hope I have handled the Bible faithfully for it frightens me that although evangelicals may be growing in number they do not know their Bibles nearly so well as they did a generation ago. Some people feel they are far too mature to use SU notes for their Bible reading and so they now have...nothing. I would hope never to grow beyond the help they offer and the expectation of meeting God in that daily practice. It has mattered to me that my colleagues are the better for having been in the organisation, not worse.

How would you describe SU now as an organisation?

Maybe the best analogy is to think of SU as a cake. My concern is that whatever way you slice the cake it is Christian. So it ought to be Christian as a mission. Nothing should be done that is not appropriate to its aims. So that means cutting out what is being done badly, or

is no longer appropriate, and also starting new things. It has to be financially circumspect and rigorous and disciplined in management. The pressures on SU are not just those of pluralism and relativism but of increasing legislation, litigation and finance.

You are now re-entering parish ministry...what are your expectations?

I love the Church of Scotland although at times it causes me great heartache. It sometimes seems more concerned with tidy decline than with believing the tide can be turned. There seems to be more management than leadership, more committees than vision. I believe that God called me to be a minister in the Church of Scotland and I don't think it incongruous that I have spent time out with Scripture Union. I do look forward to the challenge of a city centre church in Edinburgh. I am going to Palmerston Place because I have a past there, as assistant, and because God has called me there. The congregation there say they are looking for a spiritual lead and know the kind of ministry I offer. So I look forward positively, and I hope realistically, to working together with people I knew sixteen years ago and new people I have yet to meet.

As with Scripture Union in this call to Palmerston Place, Colin's past, present and future are brought together. God's pattern for him seems to be cyclical. May he know God's continuing hand of blessing as he trusts Him in his ongoing adventure of ministry.

Evangelism

Seeker Services

Rev. James Taylor

*when it comes to communicating the Gospel
what methods is it right to use?*

A sentence in a Christmas letter from a much respected friend in the pastoral ministry was deeply disturbing. He is a godly man who desires to be faithful to God and all His ways. His comments on the current scene, therefore, deserve to be taken seriously. He wrote, 'While our ecclesiastical leaders jump about from one gimmick to the next, in morbid panic after 'contemporariness', the gathered church must continue with its pulpit and pastoral work.

His words struck a sensitive area for our fellowship had just embarked on a series of 'Seeker Services', designed to reach the non-church goer and, to quote the latest jargon, with as low a 'cringe factor' as possible.

Were we, in fact, jumping on to another gimmick, panicking in our desire to be contemporary and being untrue to our calling? Was the pastor acquiescing in superficiality? Did my friend's strictures apply? Were we sliding thoughtlessly into something false?

These services, as is now generally

known, were pioneered by the Willowcreek Church in Chicago. The leaders there have attempted to communicate the Gospel using drama, dance, poetry, even secular songs and substituting performance for participation. Many churches have found them an effective means of communication.

The essential problem they pose, and which my friend identified, has been a long time around and presents itself frequently to those whose desire is to witness the salvation of the lost. When it comes to communicating the Gospel what methods is it right to use and are there any means which are 'out' for a Christian fellowship? What is legitimate and what deserves the condemnation of gimmick? Can Scripture help?

Paul thankfully seemed to sense the problem. In a graphic passage (1 Cor. 9:19-23) he adopts two stances each of which contains a twofold principle.

Free—yet a servant

He tells us, first of all, that he is free—

yet a servant. 'Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible'(v19). He has been writing of his right to be supported by the church. 'If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?'(v12). He insists, however, that he has not exercised this right in Corinth. He declined to be bound to them so that he could be free to spread the Gospel. 'But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with everything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ'(v12b). In his work as an evangelist no one held or tugged his reins, he was no puppet on a string, he was not a managed or controlled employee of the church. His financial independence meant that he was free to be a slave of the Gospel(v19). What he did, and how he did it, was not dictated by whomever held the purse strings, but was for the advance of the Gospel. His purpose as a slave or servant was clear. It was 'to win as many as possible'(v19). By 'winning' (he uses the word five times in the pas-

sage) he meant 'the salvation of others'(v22).

So we see the purpose and the driving force behind all that the apostle did and the motive behind the methods he adopted. 'You may question some of my methods, but my motive is to save sinners and my purpose is to win others for Christ'. 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel'(v16b). He was free from other Christians, then, in order to be a slave to the Gospel.

Accommodating—but firm

Paul enunciates a second twofold principle. At times he accommodated himself to those who 'were under the law', in other words, the Jews. He was firm, however, about 'not being under the law' himself(v20). At times he accommodated himself to 'those who did not have the law', in other words, the Gentiles. He was, however, firm about 'being under Christ's law' himself(v21). At times he accommodated himself to the 'weak', in other words, those who had problems eating meat(v22). He was quite firm elsewhere, however, about his

own 'strength'. For himself he had neither problem nor quibble.

Paul's preparedness to be accommodating was far removed from the 'all things to all men' of the spineless and unprincipled. It was forged by his overriding aim and purpose. 'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some'(v22b). Accommodating, therefore, he might be but he was rock solid and firm on essentials. He might accommodate himself to those under the law, but not for one second did he look to the law for salvation. His faith was firmly in Jesus Christ. He might accommodate himself to those without the law, but he lived in absolute obedience to Jesus Christ. He might accommodate himself to the weak, but not for a moment did he believe that these 'gods' existed to whom the meat had been offered.

So, despite the methods he used or the stance he adopted, the apostle was rock solid on essentials. About the truth of salvation through faith in Christ alone there was not the slightest hint of wooliness or shilly-shallying. Quite the opposite. On these essential matters he would not budge whatever else he might feel free to do.

Cultural barriers

Before we apply Paul's stance it is well to remind ourselves that we face the responsibility of reaching with the same gospel as gripped the apostle a largely pagan society, where God is considered

irrelevant or unnecessary. In addition, we do so from a church whose culture is largely alien to the majority of those we seek to reach. Our hymns, language, services, the priority we give to the spoken or written word and so much else, are off-putting or peculiar to our target audience.

This writer well remembers the puzzled reaction in a school class when he asked them to turn in the Bibles he had distributed to a certain book and chapter and verse. What was commonplace to a church congregation seemed to the youngsters a bizarre way of finding a passage. Why not just give the page number? In that and a host of other ways we are reminded of the immense gap we are commanded to cross with the unchanging gospel. We are increasingly realising that it is a gap made wide, not only by the alienation of mankind's sin, but also by differences of culture.

Applying Paul's teaching

So what do we learn from the apostle capable of being applied in our modern scene, especially if we are attempting to depart from traditional and accepted methods?

Our motives have to be certain

Whatever we do our motive must be that of winning men and women to Christ Jesus. We dare not try to be trendy and with-it for their own sake. We are not establishing a bright image or trying to gain a certain reputation. Certainly

...or

Crossing the Cultural Barriers

we are not aiming to arouse or entertain or to give our radical young people their head. Our aim is to win lost souls and to see pagans become Christians. If we are bluntly asked, 'Are you trying to convert us?' then the answer must be an unequivocal, but gracious, 'Yes!' That is to be the passion and the driving force behind all that we do and it daren't be soft peddled or disguised. We are slaves of sinners, and free from all other restrictions, in order to bring salvation to those who are without Christ. In this way we stand in succession to Paul.

Our convictions must be clear

Whatever methods of communication we use there is to be no woolliness about what we believe, no soft peddling the truth of the gospel. The temptation to be less than firm has always been fatal in the Christian church and is the path to modern disaster. Methods may be used which seem unusual and cause some Christians to be uncomfortable. We may try to eliminate from our services much of what causes the outsider, and even some Christians, to cringe. There has, however, to be no fudging of the enormity and reality of human sin and rebellion, of the truth of salvation through faith in Christ alone, of the need for repentance and faith and of the good news of Christ the only hope for the world.

Our approach may be accommodating

To reach those we hope to win we may, with good apostolic example before us, go beyond half way to meet them, enter their thought forms and attitudes, stand where they stand, use their language, play their music and appreciate their interests. The New Testament evangelists were not slow to cross cultural bridges to the people of their times. Paul did it brilliantly in Athens. We may have to start our evangelism in an idiom which is strange to us but familiar to them but our aim is to bring them from where they are to Jesus Christ.

Our consistency has to be guarded

Paul jealously guarded his freedom to be a Jew to win Jews, to get alongside

people and identify with them in order to win them. But he reacted strongly to anything which compromised the Gospel. One example clearly illustrates the strength of his insistence on consistency. When Peter came to Antioch he separated himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of the reaction of the Jews. 'I opposed him to his face', wrote Paul, 'because he was clearly in the wrong' (Gal. 2:11). His own attitude, and the attitude he required from others, was that he would accommodate himself to those whom he wished to win but he would not deny or compromise his Gospel.

What this surely means for us is that in our evangelism we shall cross some strange, even uncomfortable, bridges to reach the lost but we shall honour consistency. We shall not touch music which is patently evil, use techniques which owe more to psychology than to the Spirit of God or employ methods which deny the Gospel.

Not for us the inducements of some of the cults, the manipulative techniques and the high pressure salesmanship of some modern evangelists. Our methods will be consistent with our Gospel.

A risky task

At one of our popular sea side resorts it was the custom some years ago for a number of Churches and Christian groups to hold open-air services on Sunday afternoons. One group attracted little attention but much amusement. They stood in a circle but surrounded themselves with canvass wind breaks. They gave the impression of hiding behind their religious wall and daringly calling on those outside to join them. Nobody did. Their message never got through.

If we set ourselves a model it will be that of Paul the evangelist, not the group at the sea front. For the risky task of reaching out we have valuable guidelines from his experience. 'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings'.

*Rev James Taylor, formerly minister of
Stirling Baptist Church*

Book Reviews

The Message of Romans

John Stott

Leicester, IVP, 1994, 432pp

ISBN 0 85111 43 2

John Stott's already widely acclaimed commentary on Romans in *The Bible Speaks Today* series is not merely an exposition but contains a theological education. Here we have vintage Stott, writing on what he and so many of the great writers throughout church history believe to be the most important book in the Bible, St Paul's letter to the Romans. Stott reminds us that Luther urged every Christian to know it word for word by heart, and to occupy himself with it as 'the daily bread of the soul.' He quotes Calvin; 'if we have gained a true understanding of the epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of the scriptures.'

In 432 pages Stott not only pursues, with precision of exegesis, the thought of the great apostle but *en passant* examines very many pertinent comments from almost all who can be claimed to be authorities on the epistle, including Augustine, Calvin, CH Dodd, Barth, Lloyd-Jones, Bruce and Cranfield. While many do not share Stott's own viewpoint, he handles their contributions with characteristic sensitivity, respect and appraisal.

No more strongly is this the case than in the important introductory essay, where Stott contends that the principal theme of Romans is justification by faith, against those who would argue in favour of other emphases.

In three sections of the essay Stott deals with what Romans is about, why it was written and gives a valuable chapter by chapter overview, expanded into a study guide by David Stone at the end of the book.

While the text of the letter is not set out in full, each chapter is handled individually, with full introductory comments, then broken down into short passages for exegetical examination and exposition.

In his examination Stott shows that he refuses to accept classical (or modern) interpretations if he is not satisfied that the exegesis of a passage has been satisfactorily met. In the controversial

Romans 7 and 8, Stott argues that 'the law of slavery and sin is the law of God' (when Calvin says that he would not dare to make so bold an assumption), so described because of its effect on human nature and man's inability to keep it. It is the same law, however, which becomes 'the law of the spirit and life' to the believer who, when justified by faith in Christ, is therefore no longer condemned, and who has the Holy Spirit to help him keep the law. Stott reminds us, in these days of emphasis on charismatic renewal and the gifts of the Spirit, that the principal intention of the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind of the believer is to lead to holiness (love of God with all one's being) and righteousness (love one's neighbour as oneself).

Peter Cook, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire

Healing the Wounded

John White and Ken Blue

Leicester, IVP, 1985 238pp

ISBN 0 85110 472 X

This book on church discipline is timely. I write this from the perspective of a minister of the national church (Church of Scotland) whose parish records from the turn of the century are littered with cases of discipline of members 'tried' by stern and forbidding elders. We now have a situation where most Kirk Sessions (meetings of elders) are composed of those with varying degrees of spiritual discernment or commitment, a very different cultural and spiritual scenario from the perspective from which this book is written. Many of us operate in a situation which is an understandable reaction to the over-enthusiastic exercise of church discipline, with not a little hypocrisy involved. Yet, is there not here, as in most cases, a balance to be found and struck?

Messrs White and Blue argue that there is significant benefit to be derived for both the 'offender,' the fellowship and the reputation of the cause of the Gospel in trying to ensure the purity of the Christian church. There are few true Christians who would disagree with that. Significantly, the sub title reads, 'The Costly Love of Church Discipline.' The book is frank and helpful in that it seeks to deal realistically with the prin-

cipal questions that arise in all our minds—viz: what if the person overtaken by a moral fault is not amenable to such discipline? Or, What if the end result is that he/she merely goes off to find refuge in another Church, or even, as seems to happen increasingly, sets up their own fellowship? These questions are not ducked.

This book does service to Christ's cause, and can be strongly recommended.

Rev. Grahame Henderson, Dingwall

Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?

David E Holwerda

Leicester, Apollos, 1995, 193pp, £12.99

ISBN 0 85111 439 3

Holwerda is professor of New Testament studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, but while speaking from a Reformed theological perspective, his whole approach is refreshingly open and generous. His mature approach, combined with an extremely lucid and accessible style, make this a very attractive book to read.

The book focuses on the way that major themes found in the Hebrew Bible are dealt with in the New Testament. His task is to examine the meaning of the much used but perhaps little understood concept of 'fulfilment'. In this context it is important to point out that he insists that when the New Testament speaks of 'Israel', it means the Jewish people, so he is also adamant in his rejection of any kind of replacement theology.

Holwerda has done us a great service in exposing the exegetical untenableness of the increasingly popular theologies of two covenants—one for the Jewish people in and through Abraham, and one for everyone else in and through Jesus. He is not a Christian Zionist of any sort, but his thorough rejection of any theology which separates Jesus from Israel is warmly welcome.

Dr Walter Riggans, St Albans

**Collected Writings of William Still
Vol. 2: Studies in the Christian Life**

Edited by Sinclair B Ferguson
Edinburgh, Rutherford House, 1994,
327pp, £19.95
ISBN 0 946068 48 8

This is the second of a three volume edition of the writings of William Still. The title, however, may be misleading as only two of the pieces in this volume originated as writings, the bulk of the book is made up of sermons and conference addresses subsequently presented in booklet form.

Those looking for a concise form of expression should note that this volume is, for the most part, 'preaching'. The sermons are long, and though there has been some editing William Still's style has not been unnecessarily cramped by over-editing. Since the 181 pages devoted to sermons cover a period of three and a half months it may be argued that this volume is unbalanced. The teaching, however, is comprehensive. One wonders if more space might have been given to other parts of William Still's ministry. Giving more space to Still's pulpit ministry does underline the fact that he is, first and foremost, a parish minister rather than a conference speaker. Apart from a 1988 address on 'Prayer', there is no material later than 1977. Perhaps Vol. 3 will present more recent material?

William Still's style of ministry could be described as consistently and graciously polemical. Many critics would unhesitatingly describe him as a controversialist. This is a most unfair misrepresentation, he has often been made out to be more controversial than he has ever intended or even imagined himself to be. The 'redressing the balance' aspect of his ministry should be seen in relation to the great change which took place a couple of years into his ministry. His style had been, by 1940's standards, extravagantly evangelistic. He became disillusioned with this approach and changed his style, focusing on prayer and systematic exposition of God's Word. This was rather controversial and 'Between one Sunday and the next numbers attending the Sunday evening service dropped by *between two and three*

hundred.' (see Ferguson's biographical introduction to *Letters of William Still*). In the light of this experience, we can understand the emphasis on redressing the balance which comes through, consistently and graciously, in William Still's ministry.

This emphasis may be seen at several points in this volume. In 'Towards Spiritual Maturity', rightly described by the editor as 'his most seminal work', William Still writes, 'Evangelical Christianity does distinguish between sins and sin... but the third dimension, the work of Satan, is seldom acknowledged.' This has been a consistent emphasis in his ministry. In the sermon, 'Resisting the Enemy', he comments, 'Sadly, we are unlikely to learn this from modern books on the Christian life.'

William Still sought to redress the balance in the direction of grace; 'This is another thing that so many involved in evangelistic work forget: the experience of Jesus Christ is something which grows, and growing things take time to grow. Sometimes I think, we have more patience with our pot plants than we have with our babes in Christ.'

In 'Rhythms of Rest and Work' William Still writes 'We may... deeply regret that in our land of Scotland sabbatarianism should so often be divorced from the gospel and become part of a legalistic religious system.' Throughout his ministry William Still has sought to emphasise the joy of the Lord. This joy comes through, even to young children.

Collected Writings is a fitting tribute to William Still's half-century of ministry at Gilcomston South. How are we to learn from William Still? He would not want any of us simply to 'parrot' him. There will be balances to redress, but they may not be the same they were a generation ago. We are to learn from William Still, and move on to address the issues of today and tomorrow with the same spiritual power and graciousness.

Rev. Dr Charles M Cameron, Portstewart

The Supremacy of God in Preaching

John Piper

IVP, 1990, 110pp, £6.95
ISBN 0 85151608 4

John Piper writes as a pastor who longs for God to be honoured in his preaching ministry. He believes that 'the goal of preaching is the glory of God in the glad submission of his people'. The means of accomplishing this is the cross of Christ, which 'holds up the glory of God in preaching, and holds down the pride of man in the preacher.'

The preacher must depend on the Holy Spirit, who has inspired the Word we preach, and anoints the preaching of the Word. The preacher must beware today's triviality and the levity that is a world away from the 'blood earnestness' of Thomas Chalmers and the 'pervading solemnity' of Jonathan Edwards.

The second part of the book focuses on the ministry of Jonathan Edwards, who challenges preachers to keep God central, and thus satisfy people's spiritual hunger. 'If we do not spread a banquet of God's beauty on Sunday morning, will not our people seek in vain to satisfy their inconsolable longing with the cotton-candy pleasures of pastimes and religious hype?'

James Packer describes this book as 'a powerful tonic for tired preachers' but it is also a book for those who sit under preaching. It will give all a thirst for serious, earnest, God-entranced preaching that will not be satisfied with moral and psychological pep talks.

Rev. Malcolm Duff, Kilwinning

The Olive Branch: An Evangelical Doctrine of the Church

Tim Bradshaw
Oxford, Paternoster Press, 1992, 306pp
ISBN 0 85364 512 4

In his address to the National Evangelical Anglican Celebration in 1988 Lord Runcie, formerly Archbishop of Canterbury, called for more contributions from Evangelicals to the growing Anglican discussion of the doctrine of the Church. Although since then several paperbacks with multiple authorship giving their views on various aspects of this topic have appeared, this is the first substantial treatment by a single author for some time. Tim Bradshaw, lecturer in Christian Doctrine and member of

various ecumenical bodies, is well qualified to deal with this subject.

After surveying the common roots and divided branches of the Church, Bradshaw then reviews the teaching of two modern representatives of the Catholic and (neo) Evangelical understandings, Newman and Barth. This sets the agenda for the rest of the book. A chapter each is devoted to the Anglo-Catholic and ARCIC synthesis, to which Bradshaw adds his own critique. The longest chapter, on Evangelical Anglican ecclesiology, also contains a criticism of it from 'right wing' Catholics and 'left wing' Free Churchmen. A further chapter deals with the radical views of the Church held by Liberation theologians and the authors of *Faith in the City*. Unfortunately this book was published prior to the appearance of the ACORA report on *Faith in the Countryside* and contains no reference to it. The concluding chapter 'Essential Anglicanism' gives the author's own practical view of how the Church can express the New Testament vision for fellowship in Christ.

This book is intended for those who already have some knowledge of the subject and also for those needing an up to date review. It would probably appeal most to clergy, readers, lay preachers and elders. Evangelical Churchmen will be strengthened in their views but encouraged to listen to others; those who belong outside their movement, to whom it is partly offered as an olive branch, should be challenged to consider a view with which perhaps they are unfamiliar. All should have a greater understanding of God's grace in grafting them, as Gentile Christians living in an age in which a divided Church claims to be seeking that unity it believes to be God's will, into the ancient olive tree of Romans 11.

Don Elcoat, Hull

The Failure of the Church of England

Arthur Pollard

Latimer House, Oxford, 1994, 20pp, £1.25, ISBN 0 946307 87 3

Arthur Pollard is Professor Emeritus of English at Hull University and a lay

member of General Synod for York diocese. This pamphlet is intended for a general audience, based as it is on an address at a Latimer House open day. This pamphlet seeks to explore the reasons for the decline of the modern Church's influence in and on society. It finds them mainly in its ethical uncertainty and preoccupation with social issues at the expense of preaching the gospel, though blame is also laid at the door of such things as departure from the Prayer Book and the introduction of 'pop' worship. Let those who disagree find better explanations—and solutions.

Don Elcoat, Hull

Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship

NT Wright

SPCK, London, 1994, 96pp, £4.99

ISBN 0 281 04805 3

Here is a book which attempts to recapture the vitality and freshness of the New Testament message. The author enters into the exciting world of the discoveries made by New Testament writers and invites us to ponder the great biblical themes.

The first half of the book considers six New Testament books, Hebrews, Colossians, Matthew, John, Mark and Revelation. An overview and setting is given for each book and the writer explores these themes by using the Old Testament to bring into focus the insights which so thrilled the first hearers. The call to follow Jesus in our modern world is just as vital and urgent as in the first century. Wright uses modern examples to show that the problems and sins which beset our world have merely changed names from those used in ancient times.

The six themes in the second part of the book are resurrection, re-birth, temptation, hell, heaven and new life. The author explores the significance of these great themes for present day disciples and what it means to follow Jesus. The approach is to bring the reader into the presence of the living Christ and where appropriate to bring words of comfort, encouragement, warning or challenge. The book, which grew out of a collection of sermons, will give the reader an appetite to explore and make

further study of these great themes and vistas of the New Testament.

Rev. Donald A MacQuarrie, Fortwilliam

21st Century Church: Why Radical Change Cannot Wait

Rob Warner

London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, 186pp, £6.99

ISBN 0 340 61231 2

'The greatest hindrance to the Gospel today is often the church' (p 17). It is such a conviction that has led Rob Warner to write this book, in which he speaks of the 'disastrous captivity of the church within a nostalgic sub-culture, out of touch with the contemporary world' (p.162).

The book begins by identifying the cultural gap that exists between what goes on in the church and in modern society, to which the Church is meant to bring the Good News of Christ. Much of this is stimulating. Using the ministry of Jesus and the apostles as examples, there is a call for a willingness to 'change outward form, without compromising the essential gospel' (p.52) in order that this gap might be bridged and the gospel more effectively communicated to that society.

Taking on board all kinds of objections to change, a course is charted to answer that call—a course which includes amongst other things: creating a sense of a loving community within the Church; the priority of mission; a re-examination of worship, including what we sing and the language we use; a commitment to teaching and prayer; a releasing of people's gifts and a willingness to question attitudes to both buildings and accepted patterns of leadership.

Not everyone will share the Renewal perspective nor the Independent background from which the author writes. Not all of the material will be relevant to every situation—some of it you may well question, but the subject of how we can make our Churches more accessible and better communicate the Gospel to today's society, is one that we must all address. For that reason the book is worth reading.

Rev. David Scott, Invergordon